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ABSTRACT

At an all-day workshop for 50 counselors from public schools and community colleges, researchers presented a 15-item attitudinal questionnaire regarding perspectives, characteristics, and conceptual information about women. The findings of this research are: (1) male counselors are either neutral or slightly positive in attitudes towards women working, while female counterparts hold significantly more positive attitudes toward women and careers, (2) general attitudinal changes for both male and female counselors become focused on the counseling process itself; (3) attitudes can be changed regarding careers for women; and (4) both male and female counselors are influenced by sex stereotypes. This research suggests that, although sex-stereotyping may be invidious and subtle, it can be overcome by a reasonable and deliberate presentation of factual data. (Author/JLL)

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The Counselor's Challenge - Why Not Let Her Be

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Abstract

Counselor attitudes toward career goals of students are often influenced by sex stereotyping, but such attitudes can be changed. By becoming aware of how and when sex stereotyping occurs, counselors can be more effective in helping their clients, especially women, to see a wide range of alternatives that include both marriage and a career.

At an all day workshop for counselors from public schools and community colleges of a southwestern region of the United States, the researchers presented a 15-item attitudinal questionnaire regarding perspectives; characteristics and conceptual information about women. Fifty counselors took the test before and after a workshop presentation on general research findings regarding the life styles of working women and implications of such findings for counseling with women clients.

Results of the research were: 1) Although male counselors are either neutral or hold slightly positive attitudes towards women working, their female counterparts hold significantly more positive attitudes toward women and careers, with or without marriage; 2) The general attitudinal changes for both male and female counselors become increasingly focused on the counseling process itself; 3) Actitudes can be changed regarding careers for women and both male and female counselors showed sizeable positive changes during the workshop; 4) Both male and female counselors in the sample population are influenced in one way or another by sex stereotypes.

Taken collectively, the data from this research tend to suggest that although sex-stereotyping may well be an invidious and subtle societal stamp, it can be overcome chiefly by a reasonable and deliberate presentation of factual data.

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WHY NOT LET HER BE: A CHALLENGE FOR COUNSELORS

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Any sort of stereotype is an invidious stamp. It hardens those who succumb to its imprint on others, and it victimizes those who are branded by it. To stereotype human beings in terms of their sex, for example, exerts often ironic, double pressures on all human beings. Many men and some women hold firm to the stereotype that women who work cannot maintain home, marriage, and family while they work -- this, in the face of demographic and psychological evidence to the contrary -- and so brand women who work as unworthy of womanhood. But the stereotype turns back on those who use it, too; those who use the stereotype often feel guilty and/or defensive about using it. In other words, the stereotype is invidious because it denies individual human dignity not only to those who bear its stamp and neither want nor need to, but also to those who do want and need the stamp to make comfortable an uncomfortable part of their lives.

Counselors themselves are no strangers to stereotypical attitudes. They see such attitudes in the behavior of their clients, and, armed with appropriate information and counseling techniques, are often successful in dispelling the myths surrounding any stereotype. However, in the face of unfortunate social attitudes against career women, counseling efforts, when made, sometimes meet with unfortunate ends. That is to say, given

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existing social attitudes which discriminate aginst career women, even to establish a facilitative counseling relationship may be difficult at best and inpossible at worst, and so both means and ends are often thwarted. To focus on counselors' attitudes toward career women in contemporary American society, then, might lend insight to counseling efforts in this regard. Toward such a purpose is the present study directed.

SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

During the spring of 1975, some fifty counselors, approximately in the ratio of two men for each woman, from the public schools and community-junior colleges of a southwestern region of the United States met in a one-day workshop session. Their purpose was to become informed about the general research findings regarding the life styles of working women as well as to discuss the implications of such findings for counseling with their client-students. At the beginning of the session the counselors responded to a fifteen-item attitudinal questionnaire designed to elicit their awareness of information in four general areas of concern:

Cluster One: American higher education's perspective toward its women.

Cluster Two: The characteristics of women in general.

Cluster Three: The characteristics of career women as children, as students, and as working wives and mothers.

Cluster Four: Contemporary conceptual information about counseling with women.

In general, the underlying research giving rise to the questionnaire demonstrates that American higher education proceeds from a rigid male perspective (Cluster One) that discriminates against the woman student and the woman faculty member. The research also indicates that women in

general (Cluster Two) are more adaptable and somewhat less manipulative than men, and that they are often victimized by unwarranted sex stereotyping. Further, definitive research in Cluster Three also makes it clear that career women are bright, intelligent, and self-confident; that they tend not to be militant "women's libbers"; but that they cope successfully with career and home, putting an emphasis on a genuinely warm home environment. Moreover, research in Cluster Four also indicates that although male counselors tend to be positively disposed toward working women, female counselors are significantly more positive toward a woman's having a wide range of alternatives that include both marriage and/or a career. (Carnegie Commission, Opportunities for Women in Higher Education, 1973; Oliver, 1975; Peters, 1974; Rossi and Calderwood, eds., 1973.)

At the end of the workshop-session in which the above data were presented, the counselors responded again to the same attitudinal questionnaire. Between the two questionnaires the respondents participated in a workshop session of four parts.

Specifically, the respondents heard two, ten-to-fifteen minute "mini-lectures" -- one by the male and one by the female workshop leader. Essentially, these mini-lectures delineated the above research findings, but from two points of view -- a researcher's (the woman) and a practitioner's (the man). After these presentations, the workshop leaders role-played a counseling situation, the man assuming the counselor's role and the woman the counselee's. This counseling demonstration offered variations and alternatives to traditional counselor responses so as to indicate to the respondents ways in which they might reduce stereotypical attitudes in themselves and in their clients. Given such an example, the respondents broke into groups of three -- a male counselor, a female "counselee," and a male observer -- to use in a simulated counseling session the variation/alternative

responses they had just observed. These simulations concluded, the respondents convened once again as a whole and participated in a discussion designed to provide feedback to the workshop leaders.

These several experiences, all of which emphasize and augment the theory and practice of career counseling with women, become the influencing factors -- more precisely, the independent variables -- to affect whatever differences obtain between the respondents' scores on the questionnaire given at the beginning and at the end of the workshop session.

Previous experience with similar groups led the workshop leaders to believe that the independent variables would have little effect in changing the attitudes of female counselors; these women either possessed such information or, being career women themselves, intuited the concepts. However, the research team (i.e., the workshop leaders) was unable to specify the nature or direction of attitudinal change either in the male counselors or in the respondents as a whole.

The overall statistical analysis proceeds by means of the t-test. The pre-test item scores were compared to the post-test item scores for all respondents collectively, for male respondents, and for female respondents. The male respondents' item scores were compared to the female respondents item scores, separately, on the pre-test and the post-test. Eventually, these several item-score comparisons were collapsed in terms of the four clusters. An overview of these analyses indicates that significant differences, ranging from the .05 to the .01 levels of confidence, obtain mainly in two of the four clusters -- Cluster One, American higher education's perspective toward women students, and Cluster Three, the characteristics of working women.

THE FINDINGS

1. An item analysis of all the respondents' scores (based on a 5-point scale -- 1 indicating the negative and 5, the positive) on the pre- and post-tests indicates that significant differences do occur on some of the items exemplifying higher education's point of view toward women (Cluster One) and the characteristics of career women (Cluster Three). These data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 indicates not only the direction of the change in all respondents' attitudes, but also the nature of the change. In Cluster One, for example, while the attitudinal change is significant at the .01 level of confidence, the direction of change in item 4 (Professors tend to hold generally negative attitudes toward women students.) moves from the negative to a position of neutrality. Cluster One's item 5 (American higher education proceeds from a male perspective.), however, represents a significant shift from relative neutrality to a more positive position. Nonetheless, in both items 4 and 5, the nature of the change brings respondents more nearly into accord with research findings at the post-test than they were at the pre-test. Similarly, the data in Cluster Three's items 13 (A high GPA correlates positively with a woman's intent to pursue a career.) and 14 (As children, career women enjoy positive relationships with their parents.) demonstrate significant attitudinal change, also at the .01 level of confidence, in the respondents' awareness of a career woman's characteristics. And again, the nature of the change brings the respondents more nearly into accord with research findings.

2. That there are significant differences between male and female counselor attitudes toward careers for women in three of the four cluster areas is indicated by Table 2. The items range from statements regarding

TABLE 1

ITEM SCORE DIFFERENCES ON PRE-* AND POST-+ TESTS

BY TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS#

	Mean		Sigma	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Cluster One				
Item 4	2.46	2.91	.76	.93
Item 5	2.73	3.82	1.04	.40
Cluster Three				
Item 13	2.56	3.46	.62	1.07
Item 14	3.69	4.02	.80	.62

*Pre-test: N = 48; 32 males and 16 females

+Post-test: N = 56; 38 males and 18 females

#For each item: P = .01

TABLE 2

PRE-TEST ITEM SCORE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE COUNSELORS BY THREE CLUSTERS

	Female (N = 16)		Male (N = 32)	
	Mean	Sigma	Mean	Sigma
Cluster One				
Item 5	3.63	.85	2.28	2.44
Cluster Two				
Item 11	4.00	.79	3.20	1.23
Cluster Three				
Item 1	4.12	.69	3.56	.79
Item 3	4.69	.46	3.72	.51
Item 6*	4.00	.50	2.91	2.40
Item 8	4.75	.44	4.03	.30
Item 14	4.25	.97	2.38	.65

*Item 6, P = .02; all other Items, P = .01.

a career woman's capacity for coping with career and marriage (items 3, 6, and 8) to her general capacity for modifying her behavior according to situational needs and relationships (item 11).

The data in Table 2 indicate that female counselors are significantly more attuned to the general research findings than are their male counterparts. In Cluster One, for example, the women realize more fully than men that higher education proceeds from a male perspective and this difference is significant at the .01 level of confidence. Similarly, female counselors are more fully aware of a woman's capacity for perceiving interrelationships in a situation and adapting her behavior accordingly, and this difference, too, is significant at the .01 level. Cluster Three, which delineates characteristics of career women, demonstrates that the female counselor is significantly more in accord with general research findings than are the men; with only one exception (item 6, P = .02) the differences are significant at the .01 level.

3. In only one cluster, Cluster Three on the characteristics of career women, are there significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores of female counselors. These data, not here tabularized, indicate that these women become more fully convinced that a high GPA is positively correlated with a woman's intention to pursue a career (item 13), and this difference is significant at the .01 level. However, these same respondents become less certain (i.e., they were less in accord with research findings on the post-test than they were on the pre-test) that the career patterns of women do not differ from those of men because women are less qualified or less capable than men (item 8).

4. The attitudes of the male counselors change between the pre- and post-tests in two clusters. Table 3 presents these findings.

As Table 3 demonstrates, the attitudes of male counselors shift significantly toward research findings in two of the four clusters. In Cluster One, the male respondents become more fully aware at the post-test than they were at the pre-test that American higher education does proceed from a male perspective (as research has found), and this difference is significant at the .01 level. In Cluster Three, also, the male counselors demonstrate significant attitudinal change regarding the characteristics of career women. Not only do they come to realize more fully by the post-test that the higher a woman's GPA the more likely she is to pursue a career (item 13, P = .01), but also they learn that a career woman is not the product of strained and/or negative relationships with her parents (item 14, P = .05).

5. Finally, three of the four clusters demonstrate attitudinal differences between the male and female respondents on the post-test. Table 4 presents these data.

Table 4's data demonstrate significant differences between the post-test scores of male and female counselors in three clusters. Although no differences obtain between the men's and women's post-test scores in Cluster One, the other three clusters do contain differences. In Cluster Two, item 11, on a woman's behavior in terms of her immediate environment, the data indicate that women counselors, more so than male counselors, become even more attuned to the general research findings in this area of concern. Cluster Three, on the characteristics of career women, demonstrates differences in several items between the two groups of respondents, and these differences range from significance at the .05 (item 14) to the .01 level of confidence (items 1, 3, 13). Similarly, Cluster four, which contains

TABLE 3

PRE- POST-TEST ITEM SCORE DIFFERENCES OF

MALE COUNSELORS BY TWO CLUSTERS

	Pre-Test (N = 32)		Post-Test (N = 38)	
	Mean	Sigma	Mean	Sigma
Cluster One				
Item 5*	2.28	2.44	3.92	.91
Cluster Three				
Item 13*	2.34	1.01	3.18	1.07
Item 14#	3.41	.89	3.87	.47

*P = .01

#P = .05

TABLE 4

POST-TEST ITEM SCORE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE COUNSELORS BY THREE CLUSTERS

	Female (N = 18)		Male (N = 38)	
	Mean	Sigma	Mean	Sigma
Cluster Two				
Item 11	3.83	.96	3.00	1.00
Cluster Three				
Item 1	4.33	.47	3.74	.63
Item 3	4.67	1.25	3.66	1.06
Item 6*	4.06	.40	3.61	.96
Item 8*	4.61	.75	4.11	.50
Item 13	4.06	.78	3.18	1.07
Item 14#	4.33	.76	3.87	.47
Cluster Four				
Item 2*	3.50	1.07	2.82	.81

*P = .02; #P = .05; all other items, P = .01.

items representing contemporary counseling information, indicates that the women counselors are more fully aware than men that female counselors in general are significantly more positively disposed toward a woman's working (item 2, F = .02). In all, each item and each cluster in Table 4 demonstrates significant attitudinal differences between male and female counselors, the women being more in accord with general research findings than the men.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Several conclusions emanate from these data. The first might read that although male counselors in the public schools and community colleges of the southwest either are neutral about or hold slightly positive attitudes toward a woman's working, their female counterparts hold significantly more positive attitudes toward woman and careers, with or without marriage. Such a conclusion coincides neatly with other research findings (see Peters, 1974, p. 14). Moreover, soft, anecdotal data also tend to underscore this conclusion. For example, on more than one occasion a male counselor has said, "What do I say when a woman student comes to me wanting to be a welder? Let her? In other words, I'm the one with the problem in sex-stereotyping, not my women counselees. What do I do about it?" In response to questions like these was the foregoing research designed.

Yet, since the male counselors do experience attitudinal change as measured by the hard and soft data here presented, there is every reason to believe that male counselors appear to be not only receptive to the idea of a woman's working, but also genuinely desirous of providing a range of alternatives for their women counselees.

Further, just as male counselors tend to experience attitudinal change from a neutral or slightly positive position to an even more positive position

according to the conceptual information carried by the independent variables, so female counselors tend also to experience attitudinal change from positive to strongly positive, and perhaps in proportional degree. Such reads the second conclusion. The analysis of data, with but one exception, indicates that women counselors experience change just as men do, but, since they are farther along the continuum of change at the outset, they go farther along the line of change under the influence of the independent variables. Consequently, it is a mistake to suggest that the female respondents of this study do not change. The conclusion is not that the male respondents change enough to catch up with the attitudes of the women counselors; instead, it is that both groups of respondents change -- in approximately the same degree and in the same positive direction, the one more than the other because of their initial positions on the continuum of change.

The next conclusion considers the nature of the attitudinal change itself in both groups of respondents. At first, the changes brought about by the independent variables seem to occur in the more general, abstract areas of Clusters One and Two, higher education's perspective toward women and the characteristics of women as women. Then, as the change is in process, it tends to focus on the attitudes held by both groups of respondents toward the characteristics of career women, and so becomes less abstract and more specific. Finally, the nature of the attitudinal changes becomes concrete, specifically so in contemporary informational counseling concepts (see Carnegie Commission, 1973; Oliver, 1975). In short, the general attitudinal changes for both male and female counselors become increasingly focused on the counseling process itself. Nonetheless, one might also suggest that, in order for specific attitudinal changes to occur, there needs first to be laid a more general background of information, and such a conclusion seems

to be borne out by Cluster Three's characteristics of career women -- the one independent variable stressed by the workshop leaders, reflected by the number of items on the questionnaire, and couched within the parameters established by the independent variables exemplified by those clusters concerned with the perspective of American higher education toward women students and the characteristics of women in general. Then, and only then, do the implications of the first three clusters become manifest specifically in the last area of counseling, Cluster Four.

In all, it seems clear that female and male counselors in the southwest's public schools and community colleges are influenced, but not necessarily victimized in one way or another, by sex stereotypes. On the one hand, both hard and soft data suggest that male counselors find it somewhat more difficult than women counselors to let go the stereotype of "a woman's place is in the home," and/or to reach out toward the current school of thought that women are in the experiences of all human beings (Macdonald and Macdonald, 1975). On the other hand, women counselors -- confronted by unwarranted stereotyping (see Peters, 1974, pp. 11-12, 15-16) which says that a woman cannot be so successful as a man in a career because she is less qualified, less committed, and less capable than a man -- seem sometimes to lack the courage of their intuitive convictions. Nonetheless, when these respondents are provided with the substantive background information inherent in the independent variables, they do change -- at least in attitude. (Whether or not they change in behavior is meat for another essay.)

Taken collectively, the data of this research study tend to suggest that although sex-stereotyping may well be an invidious and subtle societal stamp, it can be overcome chiefly by a reasonable and deliberate presentation of factual data. Once counselors, both men and women, become aware of

how and when sex stereotyping occurs, especially in terms of women and careers, their counseling efforts to overcome those human indignities caused by such stereotyping can and will meet with success.

Just as women need to feel that they are capable of contributing to societal good in their own way, be it career or marriage or some combination of both, so men need to feel that theirs is not the single, overburdening, soul-wrenching responsibility for the on-going good of society. In the complexity that is the contemporary American society, one sex's sole responsibility for on-going societal good is too great a burden to shoulder. Women can and should play an integral role. Facilitating this role is the responsibility -- and the challenge -- of all the counselors in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities.

Why not, then, let a woman be what she can be?

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